

Washington, D.C. - Members of Illinois' and Indiana's Congressional delegations joined Congresswoman Melissa Bean (IL-08) today to urge federal regulators to reject a request from Canadian National Railroad (CN) to fast-track an environmental review of its proposed purchase of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern Railroad (EJ&E).

On May 13, CN officials asked the Surface Transportation Board (STB), which governs the sale, to complete its Environmental Impact Statement by Dec. 1. As noted in the bipartisan joint letter, that would leave only six months for completion of the study – one third of the minimum 18 months total the STB said is typically required for such a study.

The letter from Representatives Bean, Peter Visclosky (IN-01), Judy Biggert (IL-13), Peter Roskam (IL-06), Bill Foster (IL-14), and Donald Manzullo (IL-16) follows a similar joint letter from Bean and Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois.

Bean, who has led Congressional opposition to the transaction and who represents more than 15 communities which will be directly affected, said: "CN wants to fast-track this review, to the detriment of all the affected communities. There has been an unprecedented level of community involvement in this issue. Rushing this review process will shortchange the communities involved and undermine the authority of the STB."

CN's proposal would result in up to a 400 percent increase in rail traffic along the EJ&E line, which cuts through many suburban Chicago communities. The increase will have a significant impact on traffic congestion on the region's roads. CN's proposal also threatens construction of the long-awaited suburb-to-suburb Metra STAR Line. CN also has yet to commit to measures that would allow expanded and more timely Amtrak service along the popular and fast-growing Chicago-Carbondale-Champaign route .

In November 2007, the STB ruled that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was required to study the impact of the sale. In April, the STB issued a ruling on the final scope of the EIS, outlining numerous broad factors that would require review. The STB has also said it would be impossible to put a timeframe on the EIS, ruling, "The time the EIS will take to prepare cannot be determined ahead of time because there is no way to predict in advance all of the specific issues that may arise. In prior cases, the EIS process has ranged from approximately 18 months to several years."

Given that the level of public interest in this project has been unprecedented, according to STB officials, Bean and her colleagues argue that a shortened review process makes little sense.

“An EIS process that is completed in less than the typical time frame of 18 months to several years, as cited by the Board as an average, would jeopardize the ability of the STB to do the comprehensive investigation warranted and undermine the credibility and authority of the EIS recommendations and proceedings,” the joint letter says.

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